

Huron Mountain Club - Keweenaw Bay Indian Community -
National Wildlife Federation – Yellow Dog Watershed Preserve

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Groups Ask Judge to Halt Mine Blasting

MARQUETTE, MICH. (September 1, 2011) – A coalition of groups yesterday asked a judge to halt imminent mining activity that would desecrate a sacred Native American site and jeopardize water quality for the Great Lakes and one of the region’s last spawning grounds for the coaster brook trout.

The Huron Mountain Club, Keweenaw Bay Indian Community, National Wildlife Federation and Yellow Dog Watershed Preserve filed the motion to stay Rio Tinto’s permits with the Ingham County Circuit Court. If granted, the stay would prohibit Rio Tinto from blasting Eagle Rock—a sacred site that sits over a proposed nickel mine.

Extracting nickel from the site poses extreme risks to water quality, wildlife and recreation. The metals are embedded in sulfide ores, which produce sulfuric acid when exposed to moisture and air. The so-called acid mine drainage has devastated natural resources in other parts of the country. And the company overseeing the project—Rio Tinto—has broken Clean Water Act laws dozens of times in mines they have controlled in other states.

Community and conservation partners have challenged the mine in court, arguing that it presents unacceptable risks to water and air quality—and that it could collapse, endangering workers and the river it is underneath. The court challenge is currently under appeal. The motion for a stay is necessary because the mining company intends to blast into Eagle Rock on or near September 14, 2011, even though the judge has not issued a final ruling on the appeal.

Commenting on the motion to stay, conservation groups said:

“Without this emergency stay, Rio Tinto could begin blasting Eagle Rock before the judge has had a chance to determine whether the mine is safe,” said **Andy Buchsbaum, regional executive director of the National Wildlife Federation’s Great Lakes office**. “The serious questions we have about this mine need to be addressed—and allowing the company to blast away in one of Michigan’s most pristine and important areas will only further jeopardize the region’s water quality, tourism industry, wildlife and quality of life.”

“My people have prayed and held ceremonies at Eagle Rock since time immemorial,” said **Susan LaForniere, a member of the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community**. “No one should be allowed to blast it apart. I hope the judge grants this request.”

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